

Toll Fraud

Toll fraud is the theft of telephone time by people who trick you into placing expensive toll calls or costly international calls. They can also fool you into paying for long distance or collect calls. Some thieves make random calls to pagers and leave an international number or toll number to get you to place an expensive call in return. The consumer does not usually realize what has happened until a bill arrives with unknown charges to unknown telephone numbers.

Consumers also can be lured into calling international telephone numbers through advertisements and other promotions for interesting or important information. Ads may promise information and entertainment services ranging from psychic readings to chat lines to employment opportunities. You may be unaware that some of these numbers are actually costly international "pay-per-call" numbers, where a portion of your international long distance charge goes to pay for the information or entertainment you receive.

If you want to know whether a particular area code is based in the United States or outside the country, check the North American Numbering Plan Administration's Web site at www.nanpa.com. The site includes a complete listing of area codes and their locations.

The protections afforded by the Federal Trade Commission's 900 Number Rule - clear disclosure about the cost of the call before those costs are incurred - do not apply to international pay-per-call numbers. There is no easy way to block access to these numbers from your telephone. If your bill contains an unauthorized call, contact your local telephone company and long distance carrier. The telephone company may provide a credit or refund but is not required to do so.



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